VIDEHA / 2026

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

Synopses of twelve Maithili plays

Gajendra Thakur

English translation by the author himself

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PLAY / 01

1. Apala Atreyi

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1. Apala Atreyi

The narrative of this play centres on Apala, daughter of the sage Atri: her education, her skin disease, the crisis in her married life and her recognition as a seer of Vedic hymns. The conflict between physical suffering and the gaze of society grows progressively more intense in her life.

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Scene One

Apala is practising her letters in a mango grove. He is unfamiliar with the Vedic mantras but has an ardent desire to study. The encounter introduces both Apala's inquisitive personality and the educational tradition of the hermitage.

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Scene Two

After the initiation ceremony, Atri explains the meaning of the Savitri mantra to Apala and the other pupils. Apala compares faults of pronunciation with faults of vision. The scene makes clear that Apala's education is not confined to memorising mantras.

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Scene Three

Atri consults physicians about Apala's skin disease. Atri is concerned not merely about the disease but also about society's treatment of it. Atri directs them to contact his family.

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Scene Four

The marriage rites of Apala and Krishashva take place at the hermitage. In the presence of the assembled sages and with the sacred fire as witness, Atri solemnises the joining of their hands. Amid the festivities, her inner conflict foreshadows the impending marital crisis.

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Scene Five

In her husband's household, Apala continues both to care for her elderly parents-in-law and to study the Vedas. Apala challenges this attitude. Rather than remain in her husband's house enduring humiliation, she decides to return to her father's hermitage.

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Scene Six

Apala devotes herself to fire offerings, the worship of Indra and the recitation of mantras. References to the chariot, the yoke and skin radiant as the sun give concrete form to the Vedic imagery of the hymn. Here personal anguish acquires the voice of a Vedic hymn and spiritual discipline.

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Scene Seven

After the great sacrifice concludes, the Brahmodaya assembly deliberates upon Apala's hymn. Krishashva asks forgiveness for his narrow outlook, but Apala rejects his claim of entitlement. Apala's achievement is not the recovery of her husband but the independent affirmation of her learning, her hymn and her self-respect.

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PLAY / 02

2. Bha Jaeb Chhu (We Shall Vanish)

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2. Bha Jaeb Chhu (We Shall Vanish)

In this children's street-corner play, the relationships between human beings, the living world, energy and imagination are presented through the performance of children and adult actors. The environmental crisis is linked to audience participation and a collective pledge.

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Part 1: The Characters of Creation

At a crossroads, the narrator invites people to form a circle and watch a play. The eight performers, Om, Astha, Jayant, Apala, Vijay, Vijaya, Neklal and Ramvati, respectively embody a bird, a little bird, a tree, a larger tree, the sun and stars, the moon, ghosts and spirits, and imagination. Their play lays the foundation for the ensuing debate on energy, heat and light.

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Part 2: Science and Imagination

The elderly Neklal speaks of a scientific experiment of his in which much more heat than light is produced. Jayant and Apala, playing trees, attribute their isolation to human destruction of forests. The lack of observation of nature, imagination and practical application emerges as an inadequacy of science.

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Part 3: The Pledge

Through song and dance, the trees explain the connections between food, warmth, fruit, flowers, shade and breath. Through coughing, song and images of roots being severed, the Earth's crisis takes shape on stage. The title's prediction of extinction is transformed into a collective resolve to save the roots.

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PLAY / 03

3. Dadhichi, the Great Giver

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3. Dadhichi, the Great Giver

The play links Dadhichi's gift to the free dissemination of knowledge, the fulfilment of a promise and the defence of truth. At the centre of the story are the qualifications for receiving Madhuvidya and the monopoly claimed by power.

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Scene One

The great sage Dadhyang Atharvan Dadhichi waits in his hermitage for a worthy seeker. Dadhichi doubts his fitness because of his attachment to pleasure and his arrogance, but imparts Madhuvidya to honour his promise. He threatens to sever Dadhichi's head if the sage imparts Madhuvidya to anyone else.

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Scene Two

The Ashvin twins come to Dadhichi's hermitage and speak of their work in the service of others and their fitness to receive Madhuvidya. Wearing the head of a horse, Dadhichi teaches them Madhuvidya. Dadhichi teaches him to make knowledge a service rather than an entitlement.

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Scene Three

Threatened by the attacks of Vritra and Shambara, Indra again seeks Dadhichi's help. Dadhichi declares that protection, not arrogance, is the proper duty of a weapon. The play concludes that Dadhichi's greatness lies in his defence of knowledge, truth and his promise.

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PLAY / 04

4. Ganga Bridge

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4. Ganga Bridge

The post-Independence dream of development, engineering education, the contracting system, workers' lives and the alliances of power constitute the subject of this play. The sight of a bridge undergoing repairs connects the story of its construction in the past with the present.

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Part 1: The Dream and the Beginning

Pallav One

The play begins with workers repairing the Ganga Bridge and a drum-beating announcer calling for labourers. A debate arises over who constitutes the government and what relationship exists between government officials and ordinary people. One teacher advocates large dams and industries; the other raises the question of development's social effects.

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Part 2: The Difficulties of Construction

Pallav One

After the children's oath, the scene moves forward in time. The contractor says that following these standards made it difficult to pay commissions. After the conversation, the sounds of the workers' hammers and the drums return the audience to the present.

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Pallav Two

At the convocation of an engineering college, a teacher discusses the country's economic and intellectual independence and the engineer's responsibility for public welfare. The question arises of large projects versus construction adapted to local conditions. A medal-winning engineer is concerned about quality of workmanship, human lives and drainage. His friend explains the actual politics of success, influence and office.

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Part 3: Self-interest and Compromise

Pallav Two

In the friend's view, the engineer from an ordinary family must acquire power, whereas he himself must preserve the power his family already possesses. The drummers carry forward the discussion of these two perspectives. The scene ends by questioning the influence of home, neighbourhood and education.

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Pallav Three

When the engineer returns to his village, his mother, his younger aunt and the villagers welcome him. The villagers are proud that he is their village's first engineer. People are ready to contribute earth from their fields and volunteer their labour.

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Part 4: Sacrifice and Downfall

Pallav Three

The engineer's mother and wife urge him to consider his safety and his family. He regards popular support and fidelity to truth as his strength. The villagers set to work with spades, and the engineer begins taking measurements. This scene of community construction contrasts with the corruption of contracting and political power that follows.

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Pallav Four

In Patna, the Chief Minister talks to the chief engineer about the funds received and the tender for constructing a bridge over the Ganga. The chief engineer reports that agreement has been reached on the commission. The appointment of a competent engineer is also deemed necessary for this arrangement.

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Pallav Five

At the construction site, the engineer raises questions about inferior materials, inadequate safety, workers' deaths, treatment of the injured and compassionate assistance for dependent families. Rather than share in the honours, the engineer wants no part in responsibility for deaths and corruption. The chief engineer explains that an election and popular support prevent him from transferring the engineer, and finally warns him to change his ways.

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Pallav Six

The Chief Minister and the chief engineer consider how to rid themselves of the honest engineer. The possibilities of transfer, allegations of corruption, outright murder and falsely publicising a suicide are raised. The engineer's integrity and popular support obstruct all these measures.

Part 5: Memory and Questions

Pallav Six

The two men in power conspire to disguise a murder as an accident. Although the chief engineer remembers the abilities and friendship of his former fellow student, he gives precedence to the interests of his office. Personal acquaintance and the shared ideals of education are defeated by the self-interest of power.

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Pallav Seven

Before the engineer's body, his wife, child, mother, elder brother and the villagers lament. The third child from the earlier childhood scene now returns as a labourer. The insecurity of labourers and the engineer's death emerge as two consequences of the same system.

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Pallav Eight

The former Chief Minister launches a book entitled Ganga Bridge, written by the retired chief engineer. A worker asks where the details of those who were killed can be found. The hope awakened by the honest engineer and his murder remain questions of collective memory, while those in power are absorbed in self-congratulation.

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PLAY / 05

5. Jalodeep (The Floating Lamp)

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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5. Jalodeep (The Floating Lamp)

The experience of a child who has lost a family in the flood develops into a narrative of drainage, relief, accountability in construction and public participation.

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Preliminary Scene

There is water everywhere and cries for rescue. A child emerges from the flood, stretching out a hand. The child says that he is safe, but before he can complete his sentence about his family, darkness descends. The meaning of this unfinished sentence becomes clear in the first act.

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Scene 1

Act 1: The Darkness of the Flood

People rush to seek shelter on higher ground. Boats, ropes, lanterns and dry food are scarce. Under these circumstances, rescuing children and elderly people emerges as the priority.

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Scene 2

Act 1: The Darkness of the Flood

Four children have taken shelter on cots stacked one above another. Three play, but the fourth grieves for the family members lost in the flood. The walls of his house are safe; his family is not. The others suggest playing whatever game he wishes. He regards the flood not as divine ordinance but as the consequence of human actions, and proposes beginning a game in which the embankments and elevated roads are mountains.

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Scene 1

Act 2: The Mountain Game

Using bowls, a water pot, cloth, clods of earth, sticks and a plate, the children make a map of the river, villages, fields, embankments and highway. The children see that, without adequate drainage, a road can divide villages instead of connecting them. In the game, the embankments take the form of mountains and the villages that of valleys.

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Scene 2

Act 2: The Mountain Game

Three people watch the children's game. At first they laugh, then describe their actual experiences of water trapped in their fields because of the road. The panchayat had claimed that provision for drainage had been made, but the mouth of the drain was blocked. The fourth child remembers his father's words: when building roads and embankments, one must not obstruct the river's natural breathing. The game thus becomes a test of people's experience.

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Scene 1

Act 3: The People's Game

The village head announces that a list of affected families will be drawn up for relief. Villagers raise the question of repeated flooding over five years and repairs that exist only on paper. The crowd demands that the water's passage be opened.

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Scene 2

Act 3: The People's Game

The engineer explains that the obstruction of old river channels, the filling of ponds, settlement on low-lying land, elevated roads and inadequate drainage together create a flood trap. The villagers can inspect construction standards, the number of structures and their maintenance. A proposal emerges to bring local experience and engineering knowledge together.

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Scene 1

Act 4: The Floating Lamp

At night, amid the sound of water, the children fear the darkness. They devise a way of lighting floating lamps. The four lamps are associated respectively with the home, stranded elderly people, submerged fields and the memory of the fourth child's father. The lamps become not merely a source of light but a means of remembering the message that the passage of water must not be blocked.

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Scene 2

Act 4: The Floating Lamp

The villagers come towards the glow of the floating lamps. Eight resolutions take shape: relief, mapping waterways, inspecting roads and embankments, accounting for public construction, educating children about safety, refraining from throwing rubbish into drains, cleaning them before the rains and making drainage mandatory in development. People's compassion turns into collective decision-making.

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Scene 1

Act 5: A New Morning

By dawn the water has receded a little. Teams are formed for ropes, medicines and food. The engineer decides to prepare a map by asking elderly people about the river's old course. The villagers resolve to remove silt, preserve dated photographs and examine drainage and maintenance accounts before future construction. The contractor promises to look into deficiencies; the fourth child insists that they be corrected.

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Scene 2

Act 5: A New Morning

The children make another map, but this time the river's course is open, there are broad outlets beneath the road, monitoring alongside the embankments, ponds and elevated shelters. Neither water nor development is an enemy in itself; obstructed waterways and blind development create the crisis. The narrative that began in grief advances towards collective reform.

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PLAY / 06

6. The Devotee of Kamala

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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The Narrator's Introduction

The narrator introduces a short children's play based on a well-known story from Sanskrit literature. He raises the question of why one should not imitate another person's action without understanding its reason.

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Scene 1

A beggar goes about the village asking for old clothes, grain and money. An elderly woman gives him clothes and food; a young wage-earner gives him money and explains the value of labour. At home, the beggar counts the money he has earned. His savings of many years have accumulated in a small pot. He wishes to go to Janakpur as a devotee of Kamala. Both his savings and his faith accompany him on this journey.

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Scene 2

On the bank of the Kamala River, before bathing, the beggar conceals his pot of money in the sand. Returning from his bath, the beggar cannot identify the site of his savings among the many identical Shivalingas. The final collective utterance advocates questioning, understanding and only then acting; the play criticises blind imitation, not devotion.

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PLAY / 07

7. Machand

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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7. Machand

Between Mutalif, a Tamil speaker, a language interpreter, an intelligence officer and a terrorist leader arise questions of linguistic distance, justice, unemployment, the narcotics trade and the system of government.

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Act 1

The intelligence officer sends Mutalif a packet of food in the court lock-up. The officer believes that Mutalif is not the principal offender but an ordinary young man caught in the net of the smuggler Habibullah. The lack of sufficient evidence against Habibullah leads into the interrogation of the terrorist leadership.

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Act 2

A prolonged debate takes place between the intelligence officer and the detained terrorist leader. The officer opposes the exploitation of unemployed young people and the destruction of their future through the narcotics trade. The debate culminates in the application of the word 'Machand' to both sides; the question of the relationship between principles and violence remains unanswered.

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Act 3

The officer, who has been abducted, regains consciousness. The officer's earlier assumptions are shaken. When he regains consciousness, he contacts his department with the assistance of the local police.

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Act 4

The officer regards his first journey as futile. But becoming a hero and surviving are not the same thing. The play does not bring questions of justice and security to an end merely with arrest or victory.

PLAY / 08

8. Sankarshan

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Introduction

To enhance his social standing, Sankarshan calls humiliation hospitality, fear wisdom, and being cheated an achievement. In his journey from the village to Delhi, his contrived self-confidence gradually crumbles. The introduction identifies a pair of shoes from Delhi's thieves' market as the occasion for his self-realisation.

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Act 1: The Collector as a Pretext

First Kallol: The Seed of Prestige

Bhaskar sits in the reception room. Yet he takes the abbreviation for the Indian Administrative Service, written beside the Collector's name, to be part of the name itself. The difference between Sankarshan's claim to influence and his lack of actual acquaintance begins to become apparent here.

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Act 2: Bengali Babu's Lesson and the Collector's Chamber

First Kallol: The Seed of Prestige

In a conversation between a friend of Bhaskar's father and Bengali Babu, the need for sympathy towards a person who has come seeking help in difficult circumstances emerges. Bhaskar is discussing official business with the Collector. Bhaskar witnesses this humiliation, but Sankarshan does not recognise him.

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Act 3: The Tale of Three Black Dogs

First Kallol: The Seed of Prestige

On returning to the village, Sankarshan claims that the Collector insisted he stay. Each, however, describes his ill-treatment to his friends as lavish hospitality. In the end, the two friends eat roasted grain.

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Act 1: The Boast about Pasijh Thorns

Second Kallol: The Lie Takes Root

On hearing that Jayaram's child Nankirba has fever and diarrhoea, Sankarshan advises giving the child juice from pasijh thorns. He reminds him that Sankarshan had previously killed the fish in a pond with the same substance. Here Sankarshan's arrogance threatens another person's life.

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Act 2: The Village Council's Penalty

Second Kallol: The Lie Takes Root

While grazing buffaloes on the village mound, Sankarshan asks for news of the village. He is told that the village council is sitting at the shrine of the village guardian. The councillors condemn his improper advice and impose a fine. Sankarshan admits his mistake, promises to adopt a sacred necklace and to pay the fine by the following day. The depth of this admission, however, is tested in the next act.

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Act 3: A Sacred Necklace in One Hand, a Spade in the Other

Second Kallol: The Lie Takes Root

On his way to the fields, Sankarshan sees a rohu fish on the field ridge and cuts it in two with a spade. Seeing him carrying the fish while wearing a sacred necklace, Gonar questions him. Sankarshan first objects to the form of familial address, then argues that he has given up eating fish, not killing them. The distinction between outward religious observance and actual conduct is revealed in this comic episode.

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Act 4: The Fear of a Telephone Directory

Second Kallol: The Lie Takes Root

Gonar Jha is looking for a number in his telephone directory. Sankarshan frightens him by saying that possessing so many numbers might arouse police suspicion and lead to his imprisonment as a terrorist. Terrified, Gonar tears up his directory. Sankarshan's baseless statement disrupts another person's ordinary conduct and destroys the record of useful contacts.

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Act 1: The Matchmakers' Smooth Talk

Third Kallol: Marriage and the Marketplace of Praise

Matchmakers arrive at the reception room of Sankarshan's father. They are entertained with flattened rice, curd, sweets and sherbet. The family's obsession with prestige and the matchmakers' exaggerated assurances render the social practices of marriage comical.

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Act 2: Returning from the In-laws' House and the Pride of Complexion

Third Kallol: Marriage and the Marketplace of Praise

When Sankarshan returns from his in-laws' home, Gonar asks about his wife. Sankarshan compares her beauty to that of the film actress Hema Malini, but repeatedly says that his wife's complexion is slightly darker than his own. This comparison reveals a tendency to present himself as superior rather than simply praise his wife's beauty.

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Act 3: Dung and the Question of Affection

Third Kallol: Marriage and the Marketplace of Praise

Gonar is removing cow dung. He asks Sankarshan whether he too has to perform this task at home. In the presence of his wife, Sankarshan does not answer immediately. When they are alone, he mentions the old custom of paying money at marriage and claims that, because he did not have to pay, his wife is not so indulged and he does not have to remove dung. His wife's voice from offstage challenges his boast.

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Act 4: Jaggery Tea and the Sugarcane of Jagannath

Third Kallol: Marriage and the Marketplace of Praise

In winter, Gonar invites him to drink tea sweetened with jaggery. Sankarshan imitates Gonar's earlier account of having renounced a fruit on pilgrimage. He says he has renounced sugarcane at Jagannath Puri and therefore cannot drink tea containing sugarcane jaggery; he wants tea sweetened with beet sugar. In this episode, the pretended display of religious abstinence for prestige produces comedy. Time passes and both friends grow older.

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Act 5: The Son Runs Away

Third Kallol: Marriage and the Marketplace of Praise

Sankarshan's young adult son runs away from home. Sankarshan recalls that Uncle Lal arranged his marriage, but the reality of family responsibilities after marriage now presents itself. Gonar supposes that the son has gone to Delhi. Sankarshan decides to go to Delhi to search for his son and, if necessary, to look for employment himself. For the first time, weariness and helplessness replace self-praise in his speech.

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Act 1: Three Sons on the Train

Fourth Kallol: The Mirror of the City

Sankarshan travels from Janakpur via Jaynagar to catch the train to Delhi. Amid the crowd, an elderly woman calls him baua (son) and asks for a little space on the seat. Sankarshan explains that he is not a baua but the father of three bauas. His habit of displaying his village prestige persists even among unfamiliar passengers, but it has no particular effect here.

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Act 2: The Police Check at Aligarh

Fourth Kallol: The Mirror of the City

At Aligarh, the police examine his luggage. They describe the khesari-lentil cakes his wife has given him for Uncle Lal as narcotics. Sankarshan tries to establish his innocence, but he is intimidated and his remaining money is taken, apart from a small sum needed to reach home by bus in Delhi. Sankarshan, who had frightened Gonar by invoking the police, himself falls victim to police intimidation and injustice.

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Act 3: Uncle Lal's House

Fourth Kallol: The Mirror of the City

At Uncle Lal's house in Delhi, news arrives by telephone that Sankarshan's son has returned to the village. Sankarshan admits that he will not be able to hold a job and expresses a wish to return to the village. After the humiliation on the train, his arrogance has weakened, but his self-realisation is not yet complete.

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Act 1: Deception in the Thieves' Market

Fifth Kallol: The Shoes of Self-realisation

In the Sunday thieves' market behind the Red Fort, Sankarshan sees a pair of shoes. Learning that his home is in Janakpur, the seller reduces the price on the pretext of a neighbourly relationship. In reality, he is cheated because of his obsession with prestige.

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Act 2: The Truth Hidden in the Sole

Fifth Kallol: The Shoes of Self-realisation

> Back in the village, Sankarshan regards the shoes as priceless and protects them from water. He compares his boast about Maithil intelligence with the Delhi vendor's cunning. Gonar does not ridicule him.

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Act 3 (Epilogue): The Narrator's Final Words

Fifth Kallol: The Shoes of Self-realisation

The narrator regards Sankarshan not simply as an individual from one village but as a representative of the craving for prestige hidden within ordinary human beings. His final admission is Sankarshan's first step towards change. The play ends by asking the audience to recognise such behaviour in their own lives.

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PLAY / 09

9. Ulkamukh

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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The Narrator and Introduction of Characters

The narrator identifies the love of Gangesh and Vallabha as the play's principal theme. The image of Ulkamukh develops out of Gangesh's fame as the author of the Tattvachintamani and the question of the oblivion of his poetry. Subsequently, with a spherical object and altered character names, the narrative assumes the form of social reality.

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First Kallol

Amid the chess cube and the sound of a jackal, Gangesh and Vallabha converse. Vallabha sings the folk ballad of Dina and Bhadri. Devadatta asks for a reward in the form of the mathematical problem of successively doubling the grains of rice on the sixty-four squares of a chessboard. The first kallol ends with apprehension about the future of knowledge and love.

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Second Kallol

Amid the chess cube, Gangesh is worried. Devadatta returns and tells them that a tradition of glosses and commentaries will grow around Gangesh's philosophical writings, but his poetry may be forgotten and 'Ulkamukh' may survive as a mere name. The social meaning of the love of Gangesh and Vallabha becomes still clearer through this ballad.

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Third Kallol

Acharya Vyaghra and Acharya Simha appear in a ghostly setting. Acharya Sarabha arrives with his disciples Khikhir and Shahi. Dina and Bhadri recall the struggles of their ballad and the episode of the Ulkamukhi jackal. Through the images of Burhiya Dahi and Kamaldah, collective resistance to hatred takes concrete form.

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Fourth Kallol

After the song of Mother Kamala, the conversation between Dina, Bhadri and Udayana brings back memories of Bhatdhala pond, Simalvan, Semapur and Manihari. Acharya Sarabha is distraught with concern about stopping Ulkamukh. From this point, the imaginative struggle of the first four kallols enters the social life of the subsequent kallol.

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Fifth Kallol

On stage, a spherical object takes the place of the cube. Amid folk songs of the months of pregnancy and of birth, Gangadhar, the son of Harapati and Sohago, is born. As he grows older, the child Gangadhar goes to Hiru's quarter. The convention of excluding the craft of leatherworkers and folk music from the realm of knowledge is challenged through this relationship.

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Sixth Kallol

Harapati and Sohago are concerned about the sacred-thread ceremony of eight-year-old Gangadhar. Under pressure from his family, Gangadhar decides to go towards the forest of Saptari. Gangadhar's journey begins from the free education of the forest towards the test of royal life.

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The Test of Intelligence in the Royal Court

Seventh Kallol

In Kirti Singh's court, Narayan, the finance minister, experiences difficulty reconciling the royal accounts. The king is impressed by his intelligence. Gangadhar becomes prime minister.

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The Anubhav Mandal and Social Change

Seventh Kallol

Under Gangadhar's leadership, the Anubhav Mandal advocates participation free from distinctions of caste and gender. Education for women, education for all, respect for labour and inequalities of property are discussed. The proposed marriage of Jive, Mansukh's son, to Medha, the daughter of the commander Harikar, becomes the decisive occasion for putting social equality into practice.

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The Marriage and Murder of Jive and Medha

Seventh Kallol

In accordance with the Anubhav Mandal's decision, Jive and Medha marry. The opposition of the king and courtiers culminates in the heinous murder of Jive and Medha. Respecting the majority decision, Gangadhar advances the matter of resistance to royal power.

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The Resistance of the Anubhav Mandal

Seventh Kallol

Madhav and his two associates assume responsibility for resistance before the royal court. After these events, Madhav reaches the royal court with his associates. The Ulkamukhi amulets are removed from the necks of all three.

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Gangadhar's Final Apprehension

Seventh Kallol

The remaining members of the Anubhav Mandal assemble. He wishes admission to remain open to all castes and to women and men even after his death. The play ends, but the question of safeguarding love, memory and equality remains unanswered.

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The Overall Narrative Thread

In their diverse settings, the nine plays of Rang-Sangam raise questions of human discernment, dignity and responsibility. In these plays, the narrator, folk songs, collective voices, light, silence and symbolic objects become means of experiencing the story on stage, rather than merely hearing it. Amid these varied outcomes, the right to question with discernment and the defence of human dignity form a significant unifying thread throughout the collection.

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10. Vyapti (Invariable Concomitance)

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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Setting and Characters

In an imaginary fourteenth-century Mithila, Udayanpur, situated on the banks of the Kamala River, is a centre of learning and commerce. The play is not a historical biography but an imagined dramatic narrative in which Navya-Nyaya reasoning takes shape through observable events, evidence, language and responsibility.

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Prologue — Doubt

The stage is dark. The grounds for the assertion that the child was inside are also questioned. In this atmosphere, a proposal is made to summon Gangesha. This prologue establishes the basis of the entire play: different people know the same event in different ways, and the duty of an inquiry is to clarify the limits of all these partial forms of knowledge.

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Scene 1 — A Dawn of Ashes

Act 1 — Perception (Pratyaksha)

At dawn, Madhav's hands are tied with rope before the burnt granary. Upon arriving, Gangesha asks Madhav his name and objects to keeping him bound without established grounds. At the close of the scene the child's death is recognised not merely as an object of inquiry but as a human truth present among them all.

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Scene 2 — What Was Seen

Act 1 — Perception (Pratyaksha)

The facts seen and those assumed are written separately on two bamboo boards. Madhav presents his account. A soldier brings a locksmith's statement that the small lock found in the ashes does not belong to the main door. The search for vyapti now advances beyond the example of smoke and fire to become connected with human life and justice.

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Scene 3 — The Timeline of the Night

Act 1 — Perception (Pratyaksha)

On the ground, Gangesha draws a timeline from dusk to dawn. Harinath was not in front of the main door throughout the night. Harinath explains that at his waist he carried a bunch of three keys: for the main lock, the small northern exit and the outer store-room. This new object further alters the structure of the original accusation.

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Scene 4 — Two Locks

Act 1 — Perception (Pratyaksha)

> There are now two locks before them: the small closed lock found in the ashes and the large open lock found in the mud of the northern drain. Harinath says that he opened the main door for Malati's arrival and closed it again. A copy at the royal accounts station records the previous day's remaining grain as eighty-four maunds, whereas the town had been informed that only twelve maunds remained.

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Scene 4 — Two Locks

Act 1 — Perception (Pratyaksha)

> The act on perception ends with established facts and with an acknowledgement of everything that could not be established by perception.

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Scene 1 — The Direction of the Smoke

Act 2 — Inference (Anumana)

On Gangesha's study veranda, Ishan attempts to establish Madhav's guilt on the basis of paksha (subject), sadhya (probandum), hetu (reason) and vyapti (invariable concomitance). Glowing charcoal contains fire but produces almost no smoke. Gangesha tells Raghu, who has brought water, that Madhav's guilt is not established. The same care required in forming knowledge is required when expressing it publicly.

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Scene 2 — Smoke from the Kiln

Act 2 — Inference (Anumana)

Numerous earthen vessels lie broken in Madhav's courtyard. Madhav's hand bears old occupational marks and fresh blisters. Madhav speaks of seeing an indistinct figure in light-coloured clothing towards the lane along the northern wall. Madhav's broken vessels remain testimony to the fact that even after an erroneous statement is corrected, its effects cannot be entirely erased.

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Scene 3 — The Exercise of Positive and Negative Instances

Act 2 — Inference (Anumana)

In the town square, Gangesha makes three circles. Harinath again admits that he pulled the rope but did not hear the bell clearly. Jatila compares samples from other oils in the town. News arrives of a wooden accounts board found on the veranda of Malati's house. The inquiry now turns towards the examination of financial accounts alongside physical indications.

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Scene 4 — Malati's Accounts Board

Act 2 — Inference (Anumana)

In Malati's house are an open ink container, a half-filled water pot, palm leaves and three lamps. On the wooden board are written 'Receipts — seven hundred and twenty' and 'Royal record — four hundred and eighty'. On palm-leaf records of ration distribution, the mark of receipt is absent beside certain names. Ishan wants to infer its remaining part but ultimately leaves it blank.

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Act 3 — Comparison (Upamana)

Comparison with the royal ledger reveals 480 as the number of sacks of paddy received that month. The figure 720 appears on Malati's board, but the board does not bear the royal seal. All three possibilities remain open: a private calculation, a private copy of the original accounts or an error. Gangesha advances the inquiry by comparing unfamiliar objects with familiar ones.

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Scene 1 — Resemblance in the Market

Act 3 — Comparison (Upamana)

An elderly locksmith identifies the large lock as the main granary lock he made himself. Harinath admits an important fact. Jatila compares the granary oil, the lamps at Malati's house and her own oil sample. The use of comparison lies in jointly examining similarities and differences, not in automatically determining a person's guilt.

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Scene 2 — Where the Footprints End

Act 3 — Comparison (Upamana)

> The place at the river landing where the footprints ended at the water is examined. A round depression near the last distinct footprint is compared with a bamboo carrying yoke. From the old shelter, two paths lead towards the northern fields and the embankment at the old landing. This scene clarifies the complexity of memory, the destruction of evidence and the absence of evidence.

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Scene 3 — Three Sequences

Act 3 — Comparison (Upamana)

> Three parallel lines are marked inside the burnt granary, and three possible sequences of events are silently re-enacted. The second possibility is that an outsider entered by the main passage, started the fire and left again. Even if the possibility of the fire starting inside is the strongest, an independent examination of the exit and the delay is required to understand the child's death.

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Scene 4 — The Closed Door and the Delay

Act 3 — Comparison (Upamana)

The burnt frame, latch and outer ring of the small northern exit are examined. Harinath admits that Niraj had come to the granary after seeing his name struck off the ration board, and that he himself had sent the child inside to ask Malati. After bringing the iron bar, Harinath tried to break the ring. The origin of the fire, the keys, the warning and administrative responsibility still have to be examined separately.

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Scene 1 — Malati's Return

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> Before dawn, five principal objects are laid out on Gangesha's veranda: a burnt fragment of the lamp, the small closed lock, the cut rope, the empty cord of the keys and Niraj's bowl. Phulia first asks about Niraj. According to Malati, the regular accounting had been completed in the evening. Malati's return alive ends the inference of her death, not the inquiry into her other actions.

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Scene 2 — Three Statements, Three Intentions

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> Malati, Harinath and Devadhar sit on three separate seats and each describe their role on the night of the fire in five sentences. Gangesha questions each speaker about the source of their knowledge. Malati feared that if she was caught with the keys and the ledger, blame for the fire would be placed on her.

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Scene 2 — Three Statements, Three Intentions

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> The scene makes clear that one confession is not proof of all accusations, and accepting a part of the truth does not automatically guarantee the truth of all remaining statements.

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Scene 3 — The Name of Two Hundred and Forty

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> Three bundles — the receipts, the daily royal summary and the secret accounts — are reconciled. On five leaves brought from an earthen tube, the figure 240 occurs three times, twice crossed out. Devadhar admits having instructed that a public daily summary of 480 be prepared and that the sheet concerning 240 be kept separate.

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Scene 3 — The Name of Two Hundred and Forty

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> The difference of 240 is now not merely an accounting figure, but a question of the right to obtain grain during famine and of institutional responsibility.

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Scene 4 — Lamp, Key, Ledger

Act 4 — Testimony (Shabda)

> Malati recounts her entire sequence of events. Jatila's examination of the oil, the burnt layer of husks, the lamp fragment found inside, Madhav's maker's mark and the earlier re-enactment correspond to this account. Instead of immediately writing a name for blame, Phulia asks that water be given to the living.

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Scene 1 — The Demand for One Name

Epilogue — Absence (Abhava)

> The open courtyard before the burnt granary has now become a public assembly. Gangesha has Ishan read seven propositions. The royal messenger wants a direct conclusion that Malati started the fire. The royal messenger orders the withdrawal of Devadhar's authority over the granary and his seal pending the final inquiry. The damage to his reputation cannot be measured completely.

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Scene 2 — What Was Absent

Epilogue — Absence (Abhava)

> Alongside the report, Gangesha prepares a list of unknown matters. Ishan's premature and erroneous conclusion had strengthened the rumour. Phulia finally asks whose Niraj's death is. Gangesha proposes filling Niraj's empty bowl. Malati begins the work of writing the deleted names again.

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Scene 3 — The Empty Bowl

Epilogue — Absence (Abhava)

By evening the assembly has ended and the courtyard has become a place for distributing grain. Ishan asks Gangesha about the culmination of knowledge. Phulia asks Gangesha one final question: on the first day, you saw the locks, ashes, smoke and rope, but did you see me? For Phulia, the visible meaning of justice lies in the two bowls. Equal light falls upon both bowls.

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Overall Narrative and Philosophical Import

> At the beginning of the play, Madhav's smoky clothes, burnt hand and dispute with the official make him an easy suspect. Niraj's death cannot be fully explained merely by naming one offender. The play's final import lies in this duality: what is unknown must not be given a false name; responsibility for what is established must not be abandoned; and what can be improved must not be deferred until a future decision.

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11. The Name That Is Not in the Book

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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Setting and Characters

Uttarsar, an imaginary village in Mithila situated in the vast floodplain of the Kosi, is the centre of this play. Eighty-six-year-old Dhanmanti Devi is a bearer of the oral tradition of women's songs and old lyrics. A chorus of three female voices is present throughout the play through song, questioning, labour, memory and collective calls.

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Prelude: Before Writing

On the dark stage, amid the rumble of clouds, three female voices urge that names be spoken, written and not forgotten. Before the final word of the song is completed, the red light of a recording device comes on. This prelude initiates the relationship between names, written records, oral memory and water that develops throughout the play.

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Chapter 1 | Scene 1: Sound on the Veranda

Act 1 — First Wave: Voice

Dhanmanti Devi sits on the veranda of her house. Madhavi wishes to record the lyric beginning 'Kanchahi Chan'. Just then Harinath arrives with a volume wrapped in cloth.

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Chapter 2 | Scene 2: The Weight of the Book

Act 1 — First Wave: Voice

Damp is creeping up the rear wall of Harinath's house. Harinath explains the actual problem in the marriage inquiry. Harinath accepts this request.

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Chapter 3 | Scene 3: The Visiting Historian

Act 1 — First Wave: Voice

Amid the rising water, Prabhakar Mishra receives Madhavi's message and reaches Dhanmanti's house. Hearing the opening words on the leaf, 'Kanchahi Chan' and 'Pavan Bhel Anath', Dhanmanti recognises the song her mother sang. Prabhakar acknowledges the importance of the song's role in people's lives, but its measure differs from that of historical dating.

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Chapter 4 | Scene 4: The First Crack in the Name

Act 1 — First Wave: Voice

Prabhakar explains that it would not be proper to declare the recovered leaf proof of the existence of a great poet Vidyapati prior to Jyotirishvara. A call is heard from the school about arranging shelter and keeping a boat ready. Dhanmanti asks everyone to leave the debate about names and listen to the approaching water.

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Chapter 5 | Scene 1: The School Veranda

Act 2 — Second Wave: The Assembly

> At night, the school veranda has become a temporary shelter. Abhay reaches the school by the elevated western path, having left his motorcycle half a kos behind. The private marriage inquiry now assumes the form of collective deliberation.

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Chapter 6 | Scene 2: The Inquiry Becomes Public

Act 2 — Second Wave: The Assembly

Village listeners and the chorus of three female voices are present on the school veranda. Madhavi favours making the procedure public; Prabhakar explains that a crowd cannot take the place of expert evidence. Harinath also accepts that it is his responsibility to check the social tendency to regard the genealogical register as infallible.

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Chapter 7 | Scene 3: Another Assembly within the Assembly

Act 2 — Second Wave: The Assembly

Amid the unstable electricity, changes in lighting and the characters' postures create an echo of an ancient philosophical assembly. The fact that women's names have been recorded less frequently in history does not prove that women possessed less knowledge. The three female voices express the sequence of listening, remembering and asking again.

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Chapter 8 | Scene 4: Sita's Silence

Act 2 — Second Wave: The Assembly

A call comes from Abhay's father. Dhanmanti cautions everyone that Sumedha's answer will be her own; others must not put their answers into her mouth. The waiting over the marriage, Sumedha's silence and the immediate danger of the flood confront one another at the same moment.

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Chapter 9 | Scene 5: The Name behind the Name

Act 2 — Second Wave: The Assembly

> Amid the labour of sending belongings upstairs, Prabhakar mentions examining an enlarged image of the lyric leaf on a laptop. Harinath speaks of suspending the marriage inquiry. At Dhanmanti's request, Madhavi switches off the recording device, so that every moment of human life in the crisis does not turn into an archival record.

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Chapter 10 | Scene 1: The Blank Line

Act 3 — Third Wave: Name

In the upper room of the school, by lantern and torchlight, Harinath opens the genealogical register. Dhanmanti sees the possibility of an honest admission of ignorance in the blank line. The blank genealogical entry thus becomes connected with the question of women's absence from history.

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Chapter 11 | Scene 2: The Body of the Lyric

Act 3 — Third Wave: Name

Madhavi and Prabhakar compare the language and ink of the lyric leaf with the oral text. Dhanmanti says that she remembers the movement of a lyric more than its lines. Prabhakar advises making a separate annotation rather than adding anything to the blank in the original register.

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Chapter 12 | Scene 3: Between Two Names

Act 3 — Third Wave: Name

> Madhavi places two outlines on separate sheets: the hypothesis of a pre-Jyotirishvara folk Vidyapati and the later, commonly recognised multilingual Vidyapati Thakur. Dhanmanti says that changing the poet's name does not change the song's sorrow, but adding a wrong name can change history. The word 'nam' (name), written by the two together, becomes the name of a question rather than anyone's private possession.

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Chapter 13 | Scene 4: The One Whose Name Is Missing

Act 3 — Third Wave: Name

Madhavi makes a list of the objects to be preserved, their sources, condition and uncertainties. Although she cannot find Barki Mai's actual name, Dhanmanti gives three memories of her life: laughing loudly, lagging behind in transplanting paddy but leading the singing, and having poor sight in one eye. If the copy is not found, only verified information concerning its unconfirmed contents will be recorded.

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Chapter 14 | Scene 5: At the Moment of Naming

Act 3 — Third Wave: Name

As the water rises, Madhavi reads the provisional archival description of the lyric. 'Kanchahi Chan' is a provisional title; the source is a family copy; the original manuscript is unavailable; the language indicates old Maithili forms; the date and authorship are uncertain. The final utterance of the female voices regards the blank not as nothingness but as space.

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Chapter 15 | Scene 1: The Boat's First Trip

Act 4 — Fourth Wave: Water

Water has risen below the school. As the boat sets out, names are called. He explains that making the right decision and bearing its sorrow are two different things.

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Chapter 16 | Scene 2: The Elevated Road

Act 4 — Fourth Wave: Water

The people from the first trip disembark on an elevated portion of an old paved road. Sumedha wants to return to the school because the pupils and Abhay are there. Hearing the call from the boat again, the discussion returns to the present.

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Chapter 17 | Scene 3: The Second Trip

Act 4 — Fourth Wave: Water

There is waist-deep water in the lower part of the school. Fekan brings the boat by the rear route; Harinath tests the depth with bamboo. Harinath acknowledges that a photograph may preserve the text, though not all the physical characteristics of the paper.

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Chapter 18 | Scene 4: The Night's Count

Act 4 — Fourth Wave: Water

The second trip reaches the elevated road. Dhanmanti coughs. Once more the sound of the boat's oars is heard in the distance.

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Chapter 19 | Scene 5: The One Who Does Not Answer

Act 4 — Fourth Wave: Water

> Fekan's third trip brings four people from the eastern quarter to safety. Sixty-three people are counted in the camp. There is as yet no answer.

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Chapter 20 | Scene 1: The Answer Is Written

Act 5 — Fifth Wave: The Remaining Voice

At dawn, Fekan and Madhavi return from the medical camp. Dhanmanti's body is at the medical camp; when the route opens, the family will decide where the funeral rites will take place. Dhanmanti's empty cot manifests the absence of the part of oral knowledge that could not enter the archive.

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Chapter 21 | Scene 2: Soaked Letters

Act 5 — Fifth Wave: The Remaining Voice

At noon, preservation of the wet books begins in the schoolroom. Harinath recognises some words from his memory. Prabhakar explains the need for a question mark so that future readers do not mistake conjecture for evidence.

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Chapter 22 | Scene 3: Deferred

Act 5 — Fifth Wave: The Remaining Voice

In the evening, Abhay comes to Sumedha with tea. From a distance, social talk about the girl's age and setting up a household is heard. Sumedha accepts the paper because not receiving a wrong decision is also a significant achievement.

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Chapter 23 | Scene 4: Naming

Act 5 — Fifth Wave: The Remaining Voice

Madhavi prepares the record of the lyric on the laptop. The difference remains between Madhavi's hypothesis of a pre-Jyotirishvara folk Vidyapati and Prabhakar's single-Vidyapati outline. Amid this acknowledgement, the present laughter of everyone is heard again.

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Chapter 24 | Scene 5: The Remaining Voice

Act 5 — Fifth Wave: The Remaining Voice

> The water has receded. Sumedha takes the chalk from the knot in the end of her sari and writes four lines of her own on the blackboard. Harinath and Abhay lift the register together, Madhavi takes the lyric leaf, and Sumedha lifts the device. The play ends not with a definitive answer but with the opportunity for the next person to write their own experience and name.

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The Overall Narrative Thread

The play's three principal narrative threads — the examination of Sumedha and Abhay's marriage, the investigation of the authorship of the lyric 'Kanchahi Chan', and the flood rescue in Uttarsar — mutually enlarge one another's meaning. The purpose of the play is not to fill a name missing from a book with imagination; its narrative culmination is to leave room to seek that name, preserve the known voice as it is and allow the new voice to speak for itself.

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12. The Ledger of Water

PLAY-STORY-WORLD

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Scene 1: Evening

Act 1: The Water Rises

The play begins on a rainy evening in an old district record office. Lachhmi Sahni, a boatman, arrives and describes the actual state of the flood. In the rehabilitation register of 1987, Malati notices an additional entry, 41-A, between 41 and 42, which does not appear in the old list. The scene ends by establishing both the immediate danger of the flood and the mystery of the old records.

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Scene 2: The Map

Act 1: The Water Rises

Ishan Mishra, from the water-resources survey team at the district headquarters, arrives at the record office. A tube labelled B-4, containing an unusually sized map, is listed in the inventory register, but it is not in the designated cupboard. Although B-4 is mentioned in three records, its actual copy is not found. At the end, there is another knock at the door.

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Scene 3: The Name

Act 1: The Water Rises

Sona Paswan arrives at the record office carrying papers belonging to her late father, Ramlochan Paswan, protected in oilcloth. Malati is familiar with Ramlochan's handwriting. Outside, the water rises, and the wall behind the cupboard begins to get wet. Sona's father's search of many years now confronts an object hidden inside the wall.

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Scene 4: The Packet

Act 1: The Water Rises

Work begins on removing the wax-sealed packet lodged in the rectangular recess of the damp wall. Inside are not one but two flat B-4 maps. Ishan preserves images of the maps for comparison. At this point the mystery of the first act assumes the form of a concrete archival contradiction.

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Scene 5: Handwriting

Act 2: Two Lands

Lachhmi returns to the record office and reports the growing danger of the flood. A handwritten annotation is found in a corner of the altered map. For Sona, the discovery connects her father's struggle with the name of a person. The scene ends with Raghunath's name linking the two maps and the posting register.

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Scene 6: Memory

Act 2: Two Lands

Malati attempts to contact her father Raghunath, but the telephone does not connect. While waiting for Raghunath, everyone continues working to secure the records. Malati places the two B-4 maps before him, one after the other. Here the basis of the confession in the following scene is established.

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Scene 7: That Night

Act 2: Two Lands

> Raghunath recounts the flood of 1987. After examining the positions of the old and current channels with his assistant Badri, Raghunath alters the B-4 boundary. Sona asks what happened to the people on the opposite side of the line that had been shifted for the sake of others. Raghunath's decision brought relief to one side, but the question of the loss suffered on the other now becomes the centre of the narrative.

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Scene 8: Father Was Not Lying

Act 3: The Price of Truth

Since the water has risen in the lower room, the records relating to the dispute are taken to the upper room. Ramlochan's notebook and a torn assistance list are opened. Malati compares the settlement mark on the map with school registers, assistance lists, private correspondence, photographs and applications. The scene ends on the recovery of a name and the anguish of belated truth.

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Scene 9: The House That Is Not Guilty

Act 3: The Price of Truth

Dinanath Chaudhary enters the upper room with a tin box and a bundle of papers. Sona describes her father's struggle and the names struck off from Dakkhinbariya. Malati and Ishan prepare a note mentioning the existence of two conflicting boundaries, the question of the 1987 amendment, the exclusion of a historical settlement and the subsequent documents of entitlement. The old key, Ramlochan's notebook and Ramdev's allotment remain placed in one row.

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Scene 10: The Calculus of Water

Act 3: The Price of Truth

> After Dinanath leaves, Ishan aligns his transparent calculation sheet over both B-4 maps. Lachhmi reports seeing a new flow of water in the dried drain behind the mango grove. The old waterway, Raghunath's memory, Sona's notebook, Lachhmi's recent observations and information on present elevations are used as distinct layers. Below, Lachhmi calls out to rescue the children and elderly people of both hamlets first.

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Scene 11: The Records Speak

Act 4: In the Middle of the Night

The computation on Ishan's computer stops midway. Hearing certain names, Raghunath remembers people from the past; some details he cannot recall. From a wet court chest, a reference to suit 43/1988 is read out. This sets the stage for the next private conversation between father and daughter.

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Scene 12: Not Justice

Act 4: In the Middle of the Night

Raghunath urges that the original map be given to him. The father describes the history of his silence after his decision. Malati decides that both maps will be preserved, as will Ramlochan's evidence and the documents of entitlement of present residents. The unfinished statement remains separately placed above the two protected maps.

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Scene 13: The Same Elevated Ground

Act 5: Before Dawn

Before dawn, the sounds of subsiding earth, water and people's calls are heard. Sona comes upstairs with a child's lost slipper. Raghunath continues dictating his statement. The water and the land dispute remain, but the joint effort to protect people and the process of recording everyone's names have begun.

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Scene 14: A New Page

Act 5: Before Dawn

Dawn spreads. In his statement, Raghunath explains the reasons for his actions, without claiming to establish their justification. The play ends not with a solution to everything but with a new archival beginning in which no name is erased for convenience and incomplete knowledge is not treated as the whole truth.

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THANK YOU

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